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A description of the English Language Institute reading courses at the University of Hawaii is presented. A reading test, given to all non-native speakers of English applying to the University, yields scores on vocabulary, comprehension, speed, and total reading ability. On the basis of these scores, students are (1) classified as exempt, more or less native speaker level; (2) enrolled in ELI 71, the basic reading course; (3) enrolled in ELI 72, the more advanced reading course; or (4) not admitted. Course work in ELI 71, which meets daily for one hour, begins with a discussion of general reading problems and practices. Students are introduced to timed reading exercises, lectures on culture, and homework in programed texts designed for vocabulary development. Markle's "Words: A Programmed Course in Vocabulary Development," Science Research Associates, 1963, is part of the present curriculum. The ELI 72 course, meeting three times a week, uses Harris' "Reading Improvement Exercises for Students of English as a Second Language," Prentice-Hall, 1966. The reading courses are summarized as stressing (1) elimination of poor reading habits, (2) training in reading by structures, (3) timed reading exercises, (4) practice in reading different kinds of material in class, (5) lectures on important cultural concepts, (6) practice in taking tests under timed conditions, and (7) vocabulary development using programed texts. (AMM)

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*Reading Instruction for College Level Foreign Students**

Ted Plaister

In his article, "The Problem of the Advanced Student in American English,"[1] Schwab has stated succinctly the needs of foreign students who have reached or passed the operational level (defined by him as a person who can converse with natives, order food in a restaurant, purchase a railroad ticket, understand and give directions; and who can conceivably employ simple structural patterns in his writing and listen with comprehension to informal speech). Schwab points out, quite rightly, that this level is insufficient for pursuing academic work. What I want to do here is describe for you what we in Hawaii are currently doing in the area of reading instruction to raise our students above this operational level to a higher one.

All non-native speakers of English applying to the University are given a reading test[2] by the English Language Institute. This test yields four scores: vocabulary, comprehension, speed, and a total reading score (this is a derived score from vocabulary plus speed). Raw scores are then converted to stanines. On the basis of the scores, students are classified in four ways: exempt (stanines 7, 8, and 9); our course ELI 72 (stanines 4, 5, and 6); ELI 71 (stanines 2 and 3); and not admissible (stanine 1). When classifying, we pay particular attention to the vocabulary and comprehension scores, giving emphasis to comprehension. As would be expected, a given individual's scores tend to fall within one or two stanine ranges for all four sub-scores.

ELI 71 is our basic reading course. It meets daily for one hour. ELI 72 is a more advanced course meeting three times a week. Exempted students are those we feel read well enough so that they can compete on fairly even terms with native speakers.

Incidentally, for all of our courses we maintain a check on placement by having teachers evaluate students closely the first week or so of classes and make recommendations for possible reassignment in those cases where test scores have not revealed true ability.

Having placed students in class, what do we do with them? First of all, we talk about reading. We give the students a handout entitled "Are You a Good Reader?" This is a compilation of generally accepted good reading

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* This paper was presented at the TESOL Convention, March 1968.

Mr. Plaister, Chairman of the Department of English as a Second Language at the University of Hawaii, is the author of *Let's Talk: Aural-Oral Practices for Thai Speakers of English* (Bangkok: Uniprint, 1962) and has published before in *TESOL Quarterly* (September, 1967).

[1] *Language Learning*, X, 3 and 4 (1960), 151–156.

[2] Form IC, *Cooperative English Tests*, Reading Comprehension (Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, 1960).

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[3] *Reader*
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practices along with what amounts to commonly agreed upon poor reading practices. These are discussed in some detail. (Students scoring in the ELI 71 range are quite often poor in other language aspects and so care must be exercised to be sure the lecture portion of the course is understood.)

The next step is to implement the approved reading skills and practices advocated on the handout. We begin this by having the students do timed reading exercises. I will detail this. Most of our students are word-by-word readers and, as a consequence, read at very low rates—125 to perhaps 150 words per minute. Evidence shows that reading by structures—in a sense by IC (immediate constituent) cuts—helps native speakers gain comprehension. To give the students practice in reading by structures we take reading materials [3] and ditto two columns on a page, each column containing a structure of not more than three or four words. With this material in hand, the next trick is to get the students to read the structures with one fixation of the eyes—or at most two in the beginning stages—moving down to the next and so on. And, of course, we want the students to do this against time. We have had some success using a metronome. Each student is provided with a 3 x 5 index card. The metronome is then set at, say, 200 words per minute. Each time the student hears the metronome tick, he moves his card down. During this, the teacher moves around the room watching for lip, head, and finger movement. It usually takes about two weeks to break the students of these habits which are conducive to slow reading.

Non-native readers are often very insecure about their reading and will simply not move their cards in time with the metronome. They feel they must look at each and every word. Another task for the teacher, then, is to see that students are working in time with the metronome. Some students catch on right away, others require supervision for considerable periods of time. It sometimes becomes necessary to stand behind a student and take over the movement of the card from him. Prompting the student a few times this way generally suffices to take care of the problem.

Work with the metronome is normally restricted to one page with two columns of words on it. After the student finishes this page we move him into the text from which the short phrases have been taken. Our rationale is that the pace set by the metronome will be kept up as reading continues throughout the article. To help achieve this, we time the entire reading selection. For the dittoed materials, all students of necessity read at the same rate. For the reading of the complete article, each student reads at his own rate. However, the student continues to read against the clock.

Each student keeps a graph which shows his reading rate in words per minute. The chart itself seems to serve as a motivating factor. It is interesting to watch students shake their heads when their reading rate curve drops. It is rewarding to watch the smiles when the curve climbs.

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[3] *Reader's Digest Readings: English as a Second Language,* Books Four, Five, and Six (Pleasantville, New York: Reader's Digest Service, 1963).

Modern Reading Skilltext Series (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, 1966).

These procedures are followed daily. In other words, the students read selected materials under time pressure in the hope that they will pick up the habit of reading by larger groups of words. Results so far are encouraging. It is not uncommon to get 125-word-per-minute readers up to about 400 words per minute in one semester. (This rate, of course, is on quite simple material. What we are presuming is that the student will transfer his new reading habits to everything he reads.)

In three to four weeks' time we stop using the metronome. Students continue to read against time, however. We also train them to use a card or their fingers as a pacer. (This is somewhat like the technique advocated by the Evelyn Woods Reading Dynamics course.) The student moves his fingers down the page just a little bit faster than he can read comfortably. This takes self-discipline. Certainly not all students can do this; but a few do, and the results are obvious.

Once the students finish reading a given selection, they complete the exercises which follow. These are the usual comprehension-type exercises. Students read at different rates; therefore, they finish at different times. What do the students do who finish first? We require them to go back and re-read anything which they have read before. We urge them to re-read, pushing themselves to read just as fast as they possibly can. (I feel that we are also probably helping students learn some English grammar this way. If they fairly fly over the page, the eye is taking in large chunks of English structure. Hopefully, some of this will rub off and become embedded in the black box.)

One obvious fault is that the better readers get more practice than the slower ones. The teacher is anxious to get to the exercise material and discuss it. So the slowest students are watched and just as soon as they finish reading a given passage and answer the questions, the teacher begins the discussion. As a result, the faster students have been practicing reading while waiting for the slower students. I suppose the answer lies in better ability grouping.

What do we do about culture content and the ever-present problem of vocabulary? We take care of culture by means of lecture. I would suggest here that teachers have to learn to practice some restraint. It is great fun to take a passage and interpret it to death. Nevertheless, there is a real need for helping students gain a deep, rather than a surface understanding of what they read. For example, I once had a class draw a picture of the football after reading a passage about football. All drawings except one depicted the football as being round (and that student had been to a mainland U.S. university for one semester during the football season). Of course, football was being equated with soccer. Another passage mentioned that a group of teenagers got home quite late. I asked what the time involved was. The answers ranged all the way from 9:00 p.m. to 2:00 or 3:00 a.m.!

We ask our teachers to read over passages to be taught and make educated guesses as to those portions which need explaining. It is then up to the teacher to try to get the concepts across. A useful technique is to use

comparisons between or among the cultures represented in the class. In other words, what is "late" for a teenager to get home—or is there even such a concept as lateness (or teenager) in a given culture?

Other than the usual vocabulary discussion in class, we supply our students with a programmed text for homework. Our philosophy has been that we want the students to spend as much time as possible reading during class. Vocabulary can pretty much be tackled outside of class. Naturally, we work on such things as context clues during class.

Ideally, the vocabulary text should be written as an adjunct to the materials being read in class. This we are working towards. We expect to finish sometime in late 1984! Until that time, we have had pretty good luck with *Words,* an SRA publication.[4] We find that many of our students have not had any work on prefixes, suffixes, bases—things most of us had in high school. (There is, of course, a theoretical question as to whether one learns any vocabulary this way, but I for one am willing to take a gamble that we get some results this way.) The *Words* book has a series of quizzes accompanying it which are administered throughout the semester.

In the upper level course, which meets three times a week, our basic text is by David P. Harris.[5] This we supplement with the Merrill *Skilltexts* (see footnote 3).

To give the students practice in reading against time as well as practice in taking tests, we have been using certain of the SRA materials on an experimental basis. Because we wanted all the students to read the same material, enough of each test for class use was photocopied. We find these daily three-minute reading tests very useful. The students unquestionably pick up speed in handling these. The tests get progressively longer and more difficult. The short passages are interesting and the students seem to enjoy them. They are easy to administer, quick to score, and provide immediate feedback. It is my feeling that there is real psychological benefit in using these daily tests. For one thing, students overcome their fear of tests, and they get used to objective tests.

As with the lower level course, longer reading selections are timed and reading rates kept. In fact, we time everything which occurs in the Harris text, including the instructions. After all, instructions are reading material too.

Vocabulary instruction is not neglected at this level. The programmed format seemed to work so well with the lower level, that it was decided to incorporate the same method with the upper. Naturally, with no tailored text being available, we turned to commercial sources. Two were selected from the *Word Clues* series.[6] Which two to use involved some educated

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[4] Susan Meyer Markle. *Words: A Programmed Course in Vocabulary Development,* rev. ed. (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1963).

[5] *Reading Improvement Exercises for Students of English as a Second Language* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966).

[6] (Huntington, New York: Educational Development Laboratories, 1961.)

guessing, but those selected, Books I and J, seem to be working satisfactorily. Because we are working with students from various major subject area fields we have to compromise on content. We assume the students are getting subject matter vocabulary from reading in their particular content field. What we hope the programmed vocabulary texts will do is improve their general vocabulary.

In summary, our reading courses stress (1) elimination of poor reading habits, (2) training in reading by structures, (3) timed reading exercises, (4) practice in reading different kinds of material in class, (5) lectures on important cultural concepts, (6) practice in taking tests under timed conditions, and (7) systematic attack on vocabulary growth by means of programmed texts.

CORRECTIONS

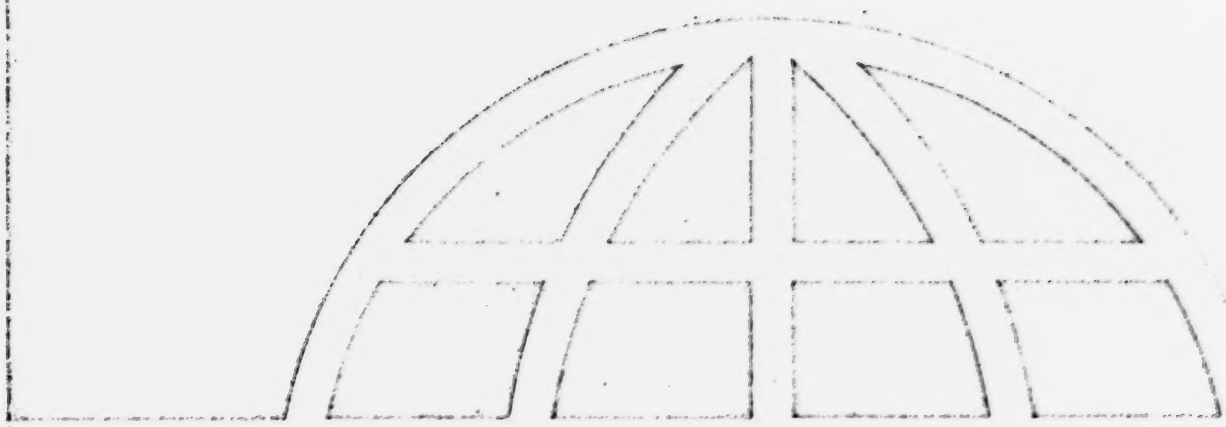
Below are corrections to be made in recent issues of *TESOL Quarterly*.

Volume II, Number 1 (March 1968), page 44, last line, first column. Replace *not* with *now*.

Volume II, Number 2 (June 1968), page 109, first column. In the quotation from Albert H. Marckwardt, *Studies in Languages and Linguistics,* line 5 should read: ". . . academic life he had had three or four. . ."

Volume II, Number 2 (June 1968), page 109, second column. In the quotation from Charles C. Fries, *American English Grammar,* the sentence beginning on line 8 should become two sentences and read: "We assume, therefore, that there can be no 'correctness' apart from usage and that the *true* forms of 'standard' English are those that are actually used in that particular dialect. Deviations from these usages are 'incorrect' only when used in the dialect to which they do not belong."

Volume II, Number 2 (June 1968), page 110, second column. In the quotation from Charles C. Fries, "As We See It," delete from the last sentence the word *rather*.



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